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# **Red or Blue? An Exploration of Political Party Affiliation and Resident Attitudes Toward Tourism in Montana**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study focused on the relationship between political party affiliation and tourism support. From 1998 to 2005, telephone surveys of Montana residents asked three attitude questions along with political party affiliation. On a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree, the three questions were: "The overall benefits of tourism outweigh the negative impacts;" "If tourism increases in MT, the overall quality of life for MT residents will improve, and;" "In recent years, the state is becoming overcrowded because of more tourists." Mean responses to all three questions showed similarities between political party affiliation. ANOVAs conducted between party affiliation and resident attitudes did find significant differences, however, further analysis through an SNK multiple comparison post-hoc test revealed that those claiming to be Independent rather than either Republican or Democrat accounted for the differences. ANOVA between Democrats and Republicans showed no significant differences between the two parties. Results indicate that a person's affiliation with a political party in Montana does not differentiate one's attitude toward tourism, rather, tourism crosses over party affiliation. This suggests that tourism support should remain stable when a state such as Montana switches the political party in power.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Research on resident attitudes about tourism has been widespread over the past 20 years. From determining the attitude of a community toward tourism for future development purposes (Allen, Hafer, Long & Perdue 1993; Andereck & Vogt 2000; Andereck & Nickerson 1997; Liu & Var 1986; Mason & Cheyne 2000; Tosun 2002) to trying to determine what factors are at the heart of their attitudes toward tourism (Carmichael 2000; Gursoy, Jurowski & Uysal 2002; Lindberg, Andersson, & Dellaert 2001; McGehee & Andereck 2004), researchers continue to explore, struggle, and define the relationship between tourism and local residents. In general, the results have been mixed. Some have found that attachment to community was a positive predictor (Brougham & Butler 1981; Jurowski, Uysal, & Williams 1997) while Lankford and Howard (1994) found the opposite to be true. Communities differ in their level of support and researchers have found in some cases that personal characteristics such as income, degree of dependence on tourism, and even owning or renting a home can predict attitudes in the sample community (Snaith & Haley 1999). Yet McGehee and

Andereck (2005) found that most of the personal characteristic variables did not predict perception of the impacts of tourism when controlling for perceived benefit from tourism.

Resident attitudes toward tourism, therefore, are confusing and not very predictable. People vary, communities vary, and situations vary for each study. Interestingly, while studies continue to explore and decipher relationships between attitude and support for tourism, no study to date has examined the relationship between political party affiliation and tourism support.

The literature on politics and tourism began with Hall's seminal book *Tourism and Politics: Policy, Power, and Place* (1994) where he exclaims, "The mainstream of tourism research has either ignored or neglected... the generation of tourism policy, and the politics of tourism development," (p. 2). Three years later, Elliot's book, *Tourism – Politics and Public Sector Management* (1997) highlighted organizations and politics, but not individuals and their tourism political connection. Similarly, Daniels and Pennington-Gray (2006) discuss the political economy of tourism, but again, not individual political persuasion. Not until legislators in North Carolina and Virginia were surveyed (Meng & McGehee 2005; McGehee & Feng in press) did party affiliation and tourism attitudes show in the literature. They found that Republicans were more likely to agree than Democrats that the tourism industry was "coming of age."

The concept of party identification tied to political behavior was identified by Belknap and Campbell in 1951 and since then, party identification has been the "central thread running through interpretations of American politics." Party affiliation was found to be, "A stable characteristic of the individual where it was likely to be inherited, it was likely to remain stable throughout the citizen's political life, and it was likely to grow in strength during that lifetime" (Nie, Verba, & Petrocik 1979). In fact party affiliation has been increasing as seen by the growth of those claiming Republican, the stability of those in the Democratic Party, and the number of Independents actually decreasing (Winneg & Jamieson 2005).

In terms of political direction, Montana is viewed as a rural western conservative state. Over the past 20 years residents have continually voted for a Republican presidential candidate and elected Republicans for two of the three congressional seats. There was a Republican governor for 20 years (until the 2004 election). During this Republican dominance, tourism in Montana has grown from 2 million visitors in 1988 to 10 million visitors in 2005 (Nickerson, Wilton, Dubois 2006). The economic impact of tourism is nearly \$2 billion and is one of the economic pillars of the state.

It seems that if a difference in attitudes toward tourism were found to exist between political party affiliations of residents within Montana, the strategy for educating citizens and politicians could be fine-tuned and streamlined for effectiveness. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between political party affiliation and resident attitudes toward tourism for three attitude questions asked over eight years in the state of Montana.

It is hypothesized that residents who claim their political party to be Republican will be more supportive of tourism than those who claim either Democrat or Independent. This directional hypothesis is based on the Meng and McGehee (2005) study, the platform of the Montana Republican party which mentions tourism while the Democratic platform does not (Montana Democratic Party, n.d.; Montana Republican Party, n.d.), and the growth in tourism during Republican control at both the state and national levels.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Data was collected through telephone interviews during the Montana Poll which is a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) survey of Montanans ages 18 and older. The Poll, conducted quarterly, used Random-Digit Dial (RDD) with Kish (1949) table random selection of respondents within households. The sample frame is sufficient to yield 400 completed interviews each quarter. This results in a sampling error rate of +/- 5 percent. Sampled telephone numbers receive up to five callbacks during evenings, weekdays, and weekends. Case status was documented in a manner that allowed the reporting and calculation of a unit response rate using American Association for Public Opinion Research (2004) standard definitions. Post-stratification weights based on Montana Poll respondent age and gender were calculated and used for generalizing to the Montana population. In the 8 years of this study, 8,799 useable surveys were obtained from Montana residents.

Since 1998, three tourism attitude questions have been a part of the poll along with political party affiliation. The three questions relate to resident perceptions of tourism and attitudes about tourism in the state. The questions chosen for use in the poll were a result of numerous statewide mail-back surveys conducted in the early 1990's which showed that these three questions represented overall attitudes (The overall benefits of tourism outweigh the negative impacts), overall affects of tourism on residents (If tourism increases, quality of life for Montana residents will improve), and a concern that tourism was a cause of feeling crowded (The state is becoming overcrowded because of more tourists). Each question was asked on a 5-point Likert scale with one being 'agree strongly' to five being 'disagree strongly'. The middle point (3) was labeled as "unsure." Because of the universal appeal of the three questions and the need to monitor year-to-year sentiments, these three questions have remained the same in content, collection time period, and methodology.

## FINDINGS

The mean responses to all three questions for the eight years show similarities between the political party responses. An analysis of these questions was conducted by forcing the two agree statements into one agree and the two disagree into one disagree. For the question, "the overall benefits outweigh the negative impacts," 68% of Democrats agreed, 68% of Republicans agreed, and 61% of Independents agreed with the statement. Similar agreement was also found on the statement, "if tourism increases, quality of life for MT residents will improve" where 70% of Republicans, 69% of Democrats, and 67% of Independents agreed with the statement. Finally, in response to the statement, "the state is becoming overcrowded because of more tourists," 28% of Republicans, 30% of Democrats, and 32% of Independents agreed with the statement (Table 1).

Analysis of variance between party affiliation and resident attitudes was conducted and found that significant differences in all three attitude measures and party affiliation existed (overcrowded  $p=.039$ ; QOL  $p=.015$ ; benefits  $p=.000$ ) (Table 2). An SNK multiple comparison post-hoc test revealed that those claiming Independent rather than a party affiliation accounted for the differences. Despite these significant results, it is important to consider that the large sample size ( $N=8,779$ ) may have influenced results towards significance. Also, while statistically valid, they may not have practical importance. A simple regression model showed that party affiliation predicted changes

in attitude scores of less than .18 on a 5-point scale. An ANOVA between Democrats and Republicans was performed showing no significant differences between the two parties (Table 3).

**Table 1: Political Party and Tourism Support Frequency Distribution**

	<b>Agree Strongly</b>	<b>Agree Somewhat</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Disagree Somewhat</b>	<b>Disagree Strongly</b>
Democrats (n=2065)	33%	35%	7%	14%	11%
Republicans (n=2380)	35%	33%	7%	15%	11%
Independents(n=2481)	29%	32%	11%	15%	14%
Democrats (n=2068)	36%	33%	7%	14%	11%
Republicans (n=2380)	35%	35%	5%	14%	11%
Independents(n=2489)	33%	34%	7%	15%	12%
<b>State is becoming overcrowded due to tourism</b>					
Democrats (n=2086)	11%	19%	4%	31%	35%
Republicans (n=2406)	11%	17%	3%	33%	36%
Independents(n=2504)	13%	19%	3%	33%	33%

**Table 2: ANOVA - Resident attitudes vs party affiliation**

	<b>F</b>	<b>Significance</b>
<b>Benefits outweigh negatives</b>	13.402	.000
<b>Tourism increases, QOL will improve</b>	4.216	.015
<b>State is becoming overcrowded due to tourism</b>	3.238	.039

Further analysis was conducted on party affiliation and tourism attitudes for each year. Of the 24 ANOVA's performed (8 years x 3 question/year), no significance was found in 23 computations. Three significant differences were found on one question in three different years. In 2002, a significant difference ( $p=.035$ ) was found on the quality of life question. A post hoc test revealed that Democrats were different than Republicans on this issue that year. In 2004, a significant difference ( $p=.006$ ) was found on the benefits questions. A post hoc test revealed that Independents made the difference. Again, in 2005, significant difference ( $p=.026$ ) was found on the benefits question but this time there was only a difference between Democrats and Independents.

**Table 3: SNK Analysis**

<b>QOL is better because of tourism</b>	N	Subset for alpha = .05	
Three political parties		1	2
Democrat...	2068	2.30	
Republican...	2380	2.31	
Independent...	2489		2.40
Sig.		.825	1.000
<b>State is overcrowded due to tourism</b>	N	Subset for alpha = .05	
Three political parties		1	2
Independent...	2504	3.54	
Democrat...	2086	3.59	3.59
Republican...	2406		3.64
Sig.		.217	.215
<b>Benefits outweigh negatives</b>	N	Subset for alpha = .05	
Three political parties		1	2
Republican...	2380	2.35	
Democrat...	2065	2.36	
Independent...	2481		2.53
Sig.		.852	1.000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 2294.468.

b The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used.

### APPLICATION OF RESULTS

The results show that political party affiliation (Democrat or Republican) does not provide further understanding of resident attitudes toward tourism on the three questions asked in this study. Therefore, there is no application that could be justified based on the results of this analysis. In other words, political behavior in regards to tourism cannot be predicted based on political party. While statistical differences did occur, these results were due to the large sample size.

### DISCUSSION

The hypothesis that residents who claim their political party to be Republican will be more supportive of tourism than those who claim either Democrat or Independent was rejected. Few significant differences were found. Republicans and Democrats tend to feel the same about tourism as suggested by the three questions. When a difference was found, it appears that Independents were more likely to contribute to the difference rather than the Republicans or Democrats.

Perhaps the most interesting conclusion to be drawn from this exploratory study is that a persons' affiliation with a political party does not differentiate ones attitude toward tourism. Unlike Belknap and Campbell's finding (1951) that suggests party identification predicts political behavior, tourism is an industry that is favored by both parties equally

as seen by the mean responses. In other words, tourism crosses over party affiliation. Unlike recent election results in the US, there does not appear to be polarization of the parties with regards to attitudes toward tourism.

This research was exploratory in nature. Additional research should be conducted with more comprehensive resident attitude surveys, not just three questions to determine if similar results would be found. Also, replications across various states should be performed to determine if the Montana study is generalizable beyond the boundaries.

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